

THE PLAINS TRUTH

VOICE OF THE NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL

Volume 48, Issue 2 Spring 2019

FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT IN HELENA

Northern Plains members go to the mat for Montana



“At a time when partisanship runs high and important bills are held hostage, SB 245 (C-PACE) was met with bipartisan support and no opposition in committee hearings. This was not luck, this was the hard work and strategy of Northern Plains members and our allies.”

-Page 14

NEW COLSTRIP CLEANUP REPORT



Doing It Right II provides hard data and expert analysis of cleanup options

- *218 full-time jobs created during first 10 years of responsible cleanup*
- *Permanent remediation of groundwater*
- *Doing It Right proposal benefits workers, farmers, ranchers, and taxpayers*

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Northern Plains Resource Council is a grassroots conservation and family agriculture group. Northern Plains organizes Montana citizens to protect our water quality, family farms and ranches, and unique quality of life.

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THE PLAINS TRUTH

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Membership Dues

\$500+ Riders of the Big Sky, \$50 Range Rider
 \$200 Bottom Line Rider, \$40 General Member
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Endowment

The Northern Plains Endowment is a permanent fund established to help sustain Northern Plains' work into the future. If you want to make a donation, a memorial gift, or a bequest to this fund, please contact the Northern Plains office.

Western Organization of Resource Councils

Northern Plains is a founding member of the Western Organization of Resource Councils. WORC is a regional network of eight grassroots community organizations that include 15,200 members in seven Western states. WORC helps its member groups succeed by providing training and coordinating regional issue campaigns. Visit www.worc.org

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TO THE MEMBERS

A transition plan after 33 years of successful leadership

Teresa Erickson, Northern Plains' Staff Director for 33 years, is retiring this year. (Be sure and read Teresa's message on page 5.)



With Teresa's retirement, new leadership will come forth, and I don't need to tell you how important this transition is for us. The Organization and Finance Task Force realizes the magnitude of Teresa's retiring and have been planning for the Staff Director succession for about 3 years.

A Succession Committee was

appointed by the O & F Task Force and consists of Beth Kaeding, Mary Fitzpatrick, Richard Parks, Ed Gulick, Teresa Erickson, and myself. This committee has met on a regular basis over the past 3 years and we have reviewed current literature addressing succession planning.

We developed a detailed time line that reflects our preparation, our finalization of draft documents, announcements of Teresa's retirement, formal posting of the job announcement, and a detailed, multi-step interview process. Staff contributed ideas that have been incorporated into our process.

The committee then identified characteristics and experiences desired in the new Staff Director to move our organization forward. We used that process to develop questions for the interviews.

We initiated a nationwide search for our new Staff Director and are currently conducting interviews. As applicants progress through the interviews, we will involve more board members in the process. We plan to have

our top candidates visit and meet staff, members, and board members. The Northern Plains board will review comments, listen to and discuss recommendations, and ultimately hire our new Staff Director.

The Succession Committee is confident that the time invested in this process will produce a gifted leader to lead our staff and to work side-by-side with member leaders in order to power this place we love –MONTANA – into the future.

I look forward to introducing our new Staff Director to you this summer. Teresa will remain on staff for a while to provide introductions and pass on wisdom that comes from 33 years of Staff Director experience.

Through all this, I'm optimistic for our organization's future. Northern Plains is financially healthy, we have a staff team that's dedicated, hardworking, and creative, our leaders are committed to democratic principles, and our membership has demonstrated grassroots principles in action for more than 46 years.

This is an observation made by a student after Teresa spoke to her class at the Wild Rockies Field Institute:

She is not quite a believer in the "there is good in everyone" mantra. Instead, she said it's okay to have enemies, seek power, and to make sure to claim credit when it's due. I didn't know what to think. Initially, I was thrown off by these ideas, but remind myself now that these are strategies for activism, and I'm left very impressed and inspired by her well-earned confidence and insight.

-Becky Mitchell
Chair



PEOPLE OF THE PLAINS

Julie Holzer, trail-blazing activist

When Julie showed up for her first day on the job at the Laurel refinery, she didn't know it would catalyze a trail-blazing career and a life of activism. Julie applied for the job at the refinery on a whim and would go on to hold every office in her union district, become the first female union representative at the refinery, become the first woman in her district of the Executive Board of AFL-CIO, and become the first female union president of an oil group in the nation.

Julie Holzer spent her life in the pursuit of social and economic justice. "I felt it was important to make sure that the wealth of this country is shared fairly with those who created it," Julie said when asked about the origins of her dedication to fighting for worker's rights. "As a woman, entering a non-traditional job, I took a look at my union contract and thought 'all these protections and earning the same wage as a man – how incredible!' It's then that I really began to understand the importance of collective power and accountability."

Her career with the union afforded Julie the opportunity to be on the front lines of many social and economic justice battles. Julie led picket lines, trained and mentored leaders, "I even spent a week camped out in Salt Lake City as part of Occupy Salt Lake!" And through it all, the collective power of the people to stand up and challenge the way things are for the way things ought to be was never lost on Julie.

After a long career with the union, Julie moved to Red Lodge to live near family and to enjoy the beauty of the mountain town. While at home in Red Lodge, Julie read in the paper that an oil company wanted to make the Beartooth Front the next Bakken oil field. Julie sprang to action and attended a county planning board meeting where she met members of Carbon County Resource Council and learned of their campaign to put an



Julie Holzer has been a tireless advocate for social and economic justice as a union representative, Northern Plains board member, and Oil and Gas Task Force member.

ordinance in place that would protect residents in the path of oil and gas development. Julie joined CCRC and found a new place to build collective power and a new passion toward which to put her energy – protecting the places she loves so that they may be passed on, unimpaired, to her granddaughter and generations to come.

Julie puts her past organizing experience to work on the Northern Plains Board of Directors and on the Oil and Gas Task Force, where she frequently attends Board of Oil and Gas Conservation meetings. "If we didn't show up together to draw the line for these corporations, no one would."

-Sydney Aussen 

A LETTER FROM OUR LEADER

Jackrabbits and turtles

This Plains Truth article is supposed to be about my retirement after 33 years of serving as the Northern Plains Staff Director. It's funny... I don't think I've ever before written a Plains Truth article in the first person during all that time.

I bring up this lack of first-person writing in order to explain a bit more about what it's like to work at Northern Plains. We work behind the scenes – “leading from behind” – finding and cultivating the extraordinariness of everyday people. As many of you know, our staff never serve as the spokespeople for our organization, we don't vote at meetings, we don't function as leaders in Northern Plains because that is what YOU, the members, do.

A lot of organizations call themselves “grassroots,” but we are as true and faithful to our grassroots nature as we can be. Our strong member leadership is something we are known for.

Northern Plains' staff is made up of some of the most talented, smart, and dedicated people you can imagine. They could probably find jobs that pay a lot more, and other places to work that demand less from their hearts, minds, and bodies. But they choose to be on this team and I'm glad for that. I don't lose sleep at night that Northern Plains will suffer in any way from my departure.

We work in teams. We do not “silo” our staff – we spread out the expertise and work in logical teams. In doing so, we foster trust, debate, and commitment to a job well done, with a focus on results. Our staff teams work with teams of members and, together, we are a powerhouse.

For those of you who know me, you know that I'm an animal lover and therefore I often compare people in my life to an animal. And, in my experience, Northern Plains is made stronger when we have a mix of jackrabbits and turtles and coyotes and lambs. The jackrabbits ensure that we don't sit around and talk only – they excite, move quickly when necessary, and zig and zag away from danger. Turtles want to think things through and make sure we aren't zigging and zagging off a cliff. All the other animals in between contribute cunning, strength, courage, endurance, and all the other qualities needed to win.



Teresa Erickson has successfully served as Staff Director of Northern Plains for over 33 years.

Thank you for allowing me to have my dream job for the past 33 years! I have been able to work to make the world better, to do it in one of the most beautiful places on earth, and with some of the best people (animals) on earth. Please thank your staff and leaders who carry the load of work and who have made Northern Plains what it is.

-Teresa Erickson 

Northern Plains releases new coal ash report

“High & dry” cleanup creates hundreds of jobs, repairs groundwater

In early April we released *Doing it Right II: Job creation through Colstrip cleanup* – an analysis of the job-creation potential in cleaning up Colstrip’s leaking coal ash ponds. Research from licensed Montana hydrologists, engineers, and economists built on two years of our own staff research to deliver hard numbers on the role of pollution cleanup in Colstrip’s future. See the tables below for some of the takeaway statistics.

Key Findings:

- A ‘high and dry’ solution would create 218 direct full-time jobs in the first 10 years of cleanup.
- “Capping” the ash in place – as proposed by plant operator Talen Energy – will cause the pollution plume to re-emerge in the future.
- Removing ash at the Units 1 and 2 ponds and storing in a new landfill (Doing It Right) permanently repairs groundwater.

Cleanup Approach	Yearly Direct Jobs (2020-2029)	Yearly Direct Jobs (2030-2069)
Talen’s Proposal	91.6	39.5
“Doing it Right”	218.2	66.4

“The water quality in this area has been going downhill for 40 years. When it starts affecting the physical and reproductive health of your cattle, something needs to be done.”

-Mark DeCock, Northern Plains member and Armells Creek rancher who lives downstream from ash ponds

Cost Breakdown	Capital cost only through 2069	Total cost through 2069
Talen’s Proposal	\$126,581,080	\$409,398,320
“Doing it Right”	\$593,953,319	\$925,657,290

“The energy companies at Colstrip have made billions of dollars over decades, and we can’t let them saddle taxpayers with their business costs. The local workforce, the area’s farmers and ranchers, and the taxpayers of Montana deserve a responsible, thorough cleanup at Colstrip. We want to see this area thrive for generations to come.”

-Becky Mitchell, Northern Plains chair

The DEQ is reviewing cleanup proposals for the coal ash ponds in the coming months. A 30-day public comment period for the Units 1 and 2 ponds will open in late summer/early fall. Contact Alex at (406) 248-1154 or alex@northernplains.org for more information.

-Alex Cuhna



COAL

BLM to update coal available for leasing based on landowner feedback

As a part of updating its Resource Management Plan for eastern Montana, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) sent letters to landowners in 17 eastern Montana counties this winter seeking their preference for or against coal strip mining on their property.

In updating a 2018 legal win that Northern Plains and allies had in federal court, the BLM is required to consider taking some amount of coal off the table for leasing, and a major component of their decision is to be made through surface owner consultation.

In the 1970s, Northern Plains won an important provision in the federal coal strip mine law called “surface owner consent.” Surface owner consent protects the property rights of landowners by giving them the right to say “no” when a private company wants to strip mine their land to get at federal coal. This protection gives ranchers and farmers the ability to keep their land intact and pass it on to future generations.

Even beyond individual landowners’ property, federal law directs the BLM to refrain from leasing coal deposits for surface mining in an area where a significant number of surface owners have stated a preference against leasing the coal under their land.

In addition to screening the desires of landowners to protect their property rights, the federal court order also requires the BLM to do a better job at looking at the climate change impacts of offering billions of tons of coal for leasing and to apply that analysis to its decision as well.

BLM’s updated plan is scheduled to be released in November of this year.



Due to a legal victory by Northern Plains and allies, eastern Montana property owners were given the right to weigh in on potential coal development in the region.

-Svein Newman 

Federal judge sides with Northern Plains, reinstates rule to close loophole

Ruling ensures energy companies pay their fair share

On Friday, April 12th, a federal judge sided with Northern Plains and allies and reinstated an Obama-era rule requiring that energy companies pay their fair share when developing taxpayer-owned coal, oil and gas. The now-reinstated rule closed a loophole where fossil fuel companies could sell public minerals to their own subsidiaries at discounted rates before selling them on the open market. This allowed them to use that internal transaction to cheat taxpayers out of millions of dollars in royalty payments. The rule requires that royalties be paid at the point of third-party sale, not on a self-dealing transaction. Northern Plains and others worked for years to get the Obama Administration to craft the much-needed reforms.

Former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke repealed the “fair share” valuation rule early in his tenure. U.S. District Judge Susan Armstrong reinstated the rule on legal arguments brought by several Western states, Northern Plains, WORC, Natural Resources Defense Council, and the Wilderness Society.

-Svein Newman 

AGRICULTURE

Soil - get into it

The opportunities to participate in building soil health only continue to grow. Attend a workshop nearly anywhere in the state, or attend a “Local Working Group” meeting sponsored by the NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) and support funding soil health projects.

Soil Health Events:

- May 24- Charter Ranch, north of Billings (Western Sustainability Exchange)
- May 28-29- Judith Basin Grazing Conference (Judith Basin Conservation District)
- June 3- Barney Creek Livestock, Livingston (Western Sustainability Exchange)
- June 11- Whitehall (One Montana)
- June 12- Matador Science Symposium, Matador Ranch, Dodson, MT(The Nature Conservancy)
- September 4-5- Montana Range Tour, Harlowton (Upper Musselshell Conservation District)
- September 28- Soil Crawl, Red Lodge (Northern Plains Resource Council)
- February 4-5, 2020- Soil Health Symposium, Billings Hotel and Convention Center (Soil and Water Conservation Society, Montana Association of Conservation Districts)

Local Working Group Meetings (contact your local NRCS office):

- May 2 Lewis and Clark County, Lincoln
- May 9 Lewis and Clark County, Augusta
- May 14 Phillips County, Malta
- May 15 Yellowstone County, Shepherd
- May 16 Lewis and Clark County, East Helena
- May 23 Lewis and Clark County, Wolf Creek



Farmers, ranchers, and eaters learn about soil health at the 2017 Soil Crawl.

LEARN MORE

- For Northern Plains soil health events contact Maggie at (406) 248-1154 or maggie@northernplains.org
- To find your local NRCS office in Montana, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/mt/contact/local or call (406) 587-6811

LOCAL FOOD

Lessons from building a Food Hub

After 3 years of planning, the Yellowstone Valley Food Hub incorporated with the state of Montana as an Agricultural Marketing Association Cooperative. Northern Plains and Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council members have poured their hearts and wallets into this project-turned-business.



The Food Hub's launch party had over 150 local supporters come to the Last Chance Pub in May of 2018.

We now take a minute to reflect on the lessons learned, and the challenges ahead.

1. Our members and community are simply the best.

Building a cooperative has been just that: a huge cooperation among our members, our neighbors, and our Yellowstone Valley communities. From day one, Northern Plains members have put in countless hours and helped to raise nearly \$100,000 (mostly from individuals) for this project. That's right: no big grants, just lots of community love. We can't thank you enough for making this all happen.

2. Cooperatives are an inspiring business model.

Cooperative businesses support Northern Plains' values to the core: democratically run businesses that return their successes to members. Rather than rewarding wealthy investors at the expense of the food producers (which happens regularly in corporate ag), co-ops distribute wealth after expenses and employees are taken care of. Decisions are made for the health of everyone in the company, not disconnected shareholders.

3. The Food Hub needs your continued love and support.

As we learned with the closing of the Good Earth Market, good things can come to an end. We must continue to support the local food that we know is good for our families, our climate and our communities, not just the idea of it. You can help us keep farmers and ranchers on the land by returning more dollars to them, not out-of-state middlemen.

-Maggie Gordon 

DEEPENING OUR ROOTS

WHY I'M A MONTHLY SUSTAINER

“

As a 6th generation Montanan, protecting our beautiful state has always been a priority of mine. It has always been important for me to advocate for what I believe in, and support organizations that do the same.

Because of this, it is my absolute pleasure to be a monthly donor to Northern Plains. I'm overjoyed to be a part of an organization that supports clean, renewable energy, keeps our water clean, and takes action on climate change.

— Katelyn Weldon
Dawson Resource Council
Glendive, MT



”

Would you like to up your membership game with Northern Plains by becoming a monthly sustainer? Call Claire at (406) 248-1154 or email claire@northernplains.org.

A bequest could be the most important charitable gift you ever make.

We can send you a free brochure with useful information for starting the process of making a bequest. Just contact Steve at:

(406) 248-1154 or
steve@northernplains.org



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Here's a roundup of Northern Plains, Affiliate, and Partnership events. Join fellow members at these events around Montana!

MAY

- **May 11** – Spring Petting Zoo co-hosted by YVCC Community Food Campaign and the Yellowstone Valley Food Hub, 11am-2pm at Swanky Roots (8333 Story Rd, Billings)
- **May 16** – Central Montana Resource Council's Annual Meeting
- **May 21** - NorthWestern Energy Rate Case Information Session, Billings
- **May 28** – Billings Green Drinks, 5-7pm

JUNE

- **June 25** – Billings Green Drinks, 5-7pm
- **June 30** – Dawson Resource Council Summer Picnic



JULY

- **July 1-31** - Northern Plains' Online Auction
- **Mid-July** - Cottonwood Resource Council Summer Picnic
- **July 18** - Beartooth Alliance celebration of Soda Butte Creek in Silver Gate
- **Late July** - Glendive Local Food Challenge Kickoff with Dawson Resource Council, date/time TBD
- **July 30** - Billings Green Drinks, 5-7pm
- **July 31- August 3** - WORC Principles of Community Organizing (POCO) training, Boise, ID- (Great opportunity for Northern Plains members! \$100. Call (406) 248-1154 for info.)

AUGUST

- **All month** - Montana Local Food Challenge
- **August 8** – SGCC partnership event: Local Food Challenge Chef's Expo in Helena
- **August 27** – Billings Green Drinks, 5-7pm

2019 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Crony capitalism, corporate welfare, hyper-partisanship, and some rays of hope: the 2019 Montana Legislature in review

It might be some time yet before we can fully assess the 2019 Montana legislative session. Northern Plains had four main objectives this session:

- Restore state-level country-of-origin labeling (COOL) for beef and pork
- Create a commercial property-assessed clean energy program (C-PACE) in Montana
- Promote our rural economies and protect the environment
- Defeat legislation that would threaten our water, air, land, or Montanans' constitutional rights to participate in our government

Writing in the final weeks of the session, we have much to be proud. But there's also good reason for disappointment and righteous indignation!

Country-of-Origin Labeling

We worked with our allies, the Montana Cattlemen's Association and Montana Farmers Union, to develop and pass our COOL bill, SB 206. Sen. Al Olszewski (R-Kalispell) sponsored the bill, but it was tabled in committee.

SB 206 was replaced by a Senate Joint Resolution (or as some call it, "a letter to Santa Claus"), SJ 16, which urged Congress to restore a federal COOL program. However, it excluded the word "mandatory." So when we added the word "mandatory," that was too much for Republicans in the House. All 58 House Republicans and 2 Democrats voted against making COOL mandatory, sending a clear message that House Republicans oppose a federal COOL program that would mean a fair market and higher earnings for Montana ranchers as well as transparency for Montana consumers.

We also worked for a House version of the COOL bill, HB 594, carried by Rep. Bradley Hamlett (D-Great Falls). This bill also died in committee. *(Read more on page 15.)*

Clean Energy

Our C-PACE bill, SB 245, was sponsored by Sen. Mary McNally of Billings. It flew out of the Senate only to be tabled 9-9 by the House Taxation Committee, despite



Members Ken Decker (far left), Mary Fitzpatrick (second from left), and Ed Gulick (center) join Northern Plains staff after testifying in support of SB 245, C-PACE.

supporting testimony from the Montana Bankers Association, Montana Credit Union Network, Montana Land and Title Association, Park County, the cities of Bozeman, Missoula, and Livingston, and several contractors, businesses, and private citizens.

We tried to "blast" the bill out of committee, but the full House voted down that motion 47-49. *(Read more on page 14.)*

Stick It to the Ratepayers

"Save Colstrip" developed as a major theme and smokescreen for all kinds of bad bills that would deregulate aspects of NorthWestern Energy, Montana's monopoly utility. It started with SB 278, sponsored by Sen. Tom Richmond (R-Billings), which promised that NorthWestern would buy part of Colstrip for \$1 and

2019 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Continued from page 12...

then pass off all of the risks and costs of operating the plant, including potential remediation and cleanup costs, to ratepayers, with no oversight by the Public Service Commission (PSC).

When many Republicans indicated that they could not support the bill, it was morphed into SB 331 (also sponsored by Richmond) which – after amendments – allowed NorthWestern to buy more of Colstrip for \$1 and then shift to ratepayers up to \$75 million in costs for operating the plant but also for buying an increased share in the 500kv transmission system that transports electricity from Colstrip to market (all without PSC oversight). Current PSC member Roger Koopman called the bill an example of “crony capitalism and corporate welfare.”

Thankfully, in mid-April SB 331 died on 3rd reading. This was after the bill’s sponsor, Sen. Tom Richmond (R-Billings), and Sen. Duane Ankney (R-Colstrip) attempted to trade the bill for Medicaid expansion, holding health care hostage for tens of thousands of Montanans, to be ransomed by this giveaway to NorthWestern, an out-of-state corporation. As the *Plains Truth* goes to print, efforts are afoot in the Capitol to graft some parts of SB 331 onto existing bills during the last week of the session.

Free Speech, Water Pollution, and More

On the bright side, we had expected to see bills that would criminalize the exercise of free speech against destructive energy infrastructure projects but only one minor bill, HB 655, materialized and it was easily defeated. We were able to defeat many bad bills this session including:

- One that would have dramatically weakened Montana’s water quality laws (HB 625)
- One aimed at intimidating non-profit organizations

that conduct voter education and registration (SB 356)

- One that sought to have the state buy and run Colstrip (HB 203)
- Several bad climate change bills
- A bad subdivision bill



Member Walter Archer testifies in support of SB 206, our Country-of-Origin Labeling bill. Photo credit: MPAN

We are asking the Governor to veto several others. By the time you read this, you have probably received emails updating you on these bills.

We also supported a bill to require that coal-fired power plant remediation jobs, like those in Colstrip, be paid at the prevailing wage (SB 264). This bill will help ensure a smoother and more just transition for coal communities as the energy landscape shifts away from

coal.

Overall, Northern Plains members have a lot to be proud of, given the make-up of the legislature. Our members made hundreds (if not thousands) of calls to legislators over the course of the session that helped turn votes to advance our priorities and kill bad bills.

Dozens of members came to Helena to lobby and testify in person. Many more wrote letters to the editor (and some wrote guest editorials), keeping our legislative representatives accountable to the people of Montana.

Once again, your efforts have shown that determined and engaged citizens make a difference. Now, it is our time to take stock, thank the legislators who fought to protect family farms and ranches, clean water, and our quality of life. And it’s time to hold to account those who didn’t.

-Cody Ferguson



2019 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Legislature keeps stifling clean energy in Montana

At Northern Plains, we believe in a just clean energy future for all Montanans:

- A future in which energy efficiency and solar power are accessible and affordable
- A future in which the well-being of Montana communities comes before the profits of corporations
- A future where everyday Montanans have a say in the decisions that affect their utility bills and the energy they use.

That's why Northern Plains brought SB 245 – the Commercial Property-Assessed Clean Energy Act of Montana – to the legislature; so we could lay the groundwork for a cleaner, cheaper, and more just energy future in Montana. We came within reach of passing this powerful legislation. At a time when partisanship runs high and important bills are held hostage, SB 245 was met with bipartisan support and no opposition in committee hearings. This was not luck, this was the hard work and strategy of Northern Plains members and our allies.

Supporting testimony came from our own members and from the Montana Bankers Association (an opponent in 2017); Montana Credit Union Network; Montana Land and Title Association; Park County; the cities of Bozeman, Missoula, and Livingston; as well as several contractors, businesses, and private citizens. These allies joined our members in writing letters to the editor, calling legislators, and traveling to Helena to rally and testify in support of C-PACE legislation.

After passing the Senate with more than a two-to-one margin, C-PACE appeared headed to victory. House leadership, however, assigned SB 245 to the House Taxation Committee – a known “kill” committee with a chairman proud of this reputation – instead of the Energy Committee (which would have been logical). Despite an outpouring of support for SB 245 during the committee hearing (with no opposing testimony), the committee tabled SB 245 on a tie vote. Our subsequent attempt to “blast” SB 245 came up short with a vote of 47 to 49.

We did everything within our power to pass C-PACE and for that we can be proud. We built a strong coalition of supporters who joined us in Helena to speak in support of this bill. We even found a willing and enthusiastic program administrator. Everyone who worked on this bill deserves to be proud.

Every odd-numbered year, we have the opportunity to bring forward legislative solutions to achieve our vision for Montana. It's 90 days of very hard work, and we don't always win. But we gain relationships with legislators, increased support and publicity for the issue, and a reputation for being a strong grassroots organization. Increasingly, Montanans understand that clean, efficient, and renewable energy – affordable and accessible to all – must underpin our state's economic future. That's the point of property-assessed clean energy. And it will be the people of our state who lead the way there.

That leadership will involve our traditional brand of citizen engagement. But it will also involve good people running for office so they can clear a path to a clean energy future, replacing those who obstruct clean energy for no real reason at all.

It's our children and grandchildren we're fighting for!



Member Ed Gulick speaks to a group of hearty C-PACE supporters during a snow-covered January rally in Helena.

-Sydney Ausen 

2019 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Montana's livestock producers failed by Legislature and ag industry groups

Country-of-origin labeling for beef and pork would be one big step forward for fair markets for producers and increased transparency for consumers. We sought to take that step in 2019 by passing a country-of-origin labeling (COOL) law at the legislature. While our bill wasn't passed, we built a strong grassroots campaign and grew support for country-of-origin labeling among ranchers and consumers.

Along the way, we built a coalition of support with two allies, the Montana Cattlemen's Association and Montana Farmers Union. We coordinated our efforts on two COOL bills, SB 206 and HB 594, to show support among Montana producers. Working together, we were able to stand strong before legislators to testify as ranchers and consumers, showing the face of real Montanans against the opposition's lobbyists.

When our senate bill, SB 206, was tabled in committee, we turned to the House, drafting HB 594 with clearer, stronger language. We kept to our grassroots organizing values, ensuring that our members were the driving force of our campaign. Sadly, the Montana Stockgrowers Association and Montana Farm Bureau spoke against Montana COOL every step of the way, opposing bills that could have helped raise prices for their ranching members.

More than 15 media outlets reported on our campaign, including three regional agriculture publications, two radio programs, and one national publication. Our messages also brought in new members across the state, including ranchers who were disenchanted with opposing agriculture organizations that failed to support fair market policies. Country-of-origin labeling has broad support in Montana's cities and towns, and we will not stop working for fairness in agricultural markets.

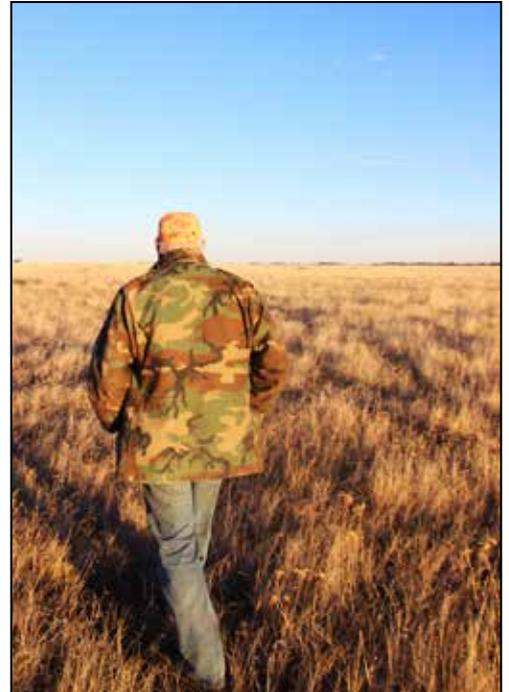
Thank you to every member who fought for COOL this session, especially to our COOL Committee and Ag Task Force members, who banded together and stood strong. We also extend a special thank you to the legislators who spoke in support of country-of-origin labeling:

Our sponsors: Sen. Al Olszewski (R- Kalispell) and Rep. Bradley Hamlett (D- Great Falls)

Rep. Connie Keogh (D- Missoula)
Sen. Margie MacDonald (D- Billings)
Rep. Andrea Olsen (D- Missoula)
Rep. Willis Curdy (D- Missoula)

And thank you to the many more legislators who voted "Yes."

To learn more about how you can support fair markets for Montana's farmers and ranchers, contact Caroline at caroline@northernplains.org or call (406) 248-1154.



Despite setbacks, our members like Gilles Stockton above, are leaving this session with heads held high ready for new opportunities.

-Caroline Canarios 

KEYSTONE XL

The convoluted Keystone XL situation

Was it legal or illegal? That is the question.

President Trump made news on March 29 by issuing a new Presidential Permit to TransCanada for its proposed Keystone XL tar sands pipeline. Per the White House's official memorandum, the new permit would authorize: "TransCanada Keystone Pipeline, L.P. to construct, connect, operate, and maintain pipeline facilities at the international boundary between the United States and Canada." His order "supersedes," (according to him) the prior permit, which was granted on March 23, 2017 - the one we've been successfully challenging in federal court.



Photo courtesy of Friendlystock.com

Then he signed an executive order on April 10 during an event with the International Union of Operating Engineers in Texas intended to "clarify" that the president is solely responsible for approving or denying pipelines and other infrastructure that cross international boundaries. The secretary of state has previously played that role – including in the case of the Keystone XL pipeline.

Desperate times seem to call for desperate measures, and Trump has clearly become desperate to save the sinking Keystone XL project. Trump was losing. We had won in district court and were well positioned to withstand appeal this summer. We had won the related issue of the pre-construction injunction. A new environmental impact statement is to be conducted to show the need and environmental considerations of the project.

Really, the only thing that's changed is the name on the permit. Why this is so significant is that it allows the White House to make the case that the project is not subject to environmental review by way of the National Environmental Policy Act. Agencies, including the State Department, the prior signer of the permit, are clearly subject to NEPA and their actions are reviewable by court. Presidential actions are less clear on this matter.

As of now, Northern Plains hasn't legally challenged his new permit (the Indigenous Environmental Network did file a new lawsuit). We are currently focused on determining how the new permit will affect our existing lawsuit, if at all, before we decide next steps.

On April 8, the U.S. Government and TransCanada filed a motion to dismiss our existing lawsuit against the 2017 permit. They want the district court's decisions to be vacated and the pre-construction injunction to be dissolved. Our response to this motion is due April 23.

America's system of checks and balances – a system built upon three independent, coequal branches of government – is certainly being tested by this administration. Trump didn't like what the courts were doing, so he conjured up a work-around. We contend that not only are President Trump's latest actions an attack on our clean air, water, and property rights, but also an attack on our most basic democratic rights. We'll continue to do all we can to fight back, including by participating in the new Environmental Impact Statement process, which we have heard is slated to continue by the State Department despite Trump's actions.

-Olivia Stockman Splinter 

CLIMATE CHANGE

We can all be better climate communicators

Discussing climate change thoughtfully and productively can be a challenge for us all. The consequences of accelerating climate change are scary and difficult to ponder. The state of our climate has been cynically politicized into an “us vs. them” issue. On top of that, the topic involves complex and overlapping systems with effects that span from the local to the global.

So it's understandable that we sometimes shy away from talking climate with friends, family, and neighbors. When it comes down to it, though, we are some of the best messengers. As thoughtful, measured people concerned about our communities, who better than Northern Plains members to take on this challenge? (*Many of you are already doing great work in this area, of course - thank you!*)

After all, the history of Northern Plains involves people from different backgrounds banding together to face enormous challenges and powerful adversaries. We have prevailed in many struggles by facing our fears, talking and listening to others, finding common ground, and helping each other navigate complicated processes that include talking to government agencies, getting the word out to the public, and organizing people.

Our history and the work we've done can help us all be better climate communicators. Here are a few ideas to consider:

- 1. Listen.** Don't simply “talk at” someone - have a real exchange. By listening, you can discover what is important to your conversation partner which makes it easier to find common ground. More importantly, you will probably learn something that helps you better understand others' perspectives and, hopefully, something about the issue itself.
- 2. Keep it local.** While many of us are concerned about melting polar ice caps, coastal flooding worldwide, or species loss across the globe, people respond most to what is happening in their own backyard. Here in Montana, we have faced significant increases in wildfires, longer droughts that hurt farmers and ranchers, and floods from increased winter precipitation resulting from more water vapor in the atmosphere.
- 3. Focus on human health.** We all care about our health and that of our loved ones. Health problems associated with climate change include increased asthma and other respiratory ailments from wildfires and fossil fuel air pollution, longer pollen seasons for serious allergy sufferers, increased heat strokes and fatal dehydration during extreme temperatures, and the spread of water-borne diseases due to increased flooding.
- 4. Discuss solutions rather than just the problem.** Most people disagree more with the expected responses they don't like (government regulation, increased taxes, market interference) than they do the actual concept of climate change. Instead of trying to convince a skeptic of the climate problem, try to transition the conversation to cool and innovative solutions. C-PACE is a great example. (*See page 14.*)
- 5. List the huge financial costs.** Many accept the science of climate change but dismiss climate-friendly policy as too expensive. While you might not be able to immediately convince such a person of your preferred solutions, you can at least remind them that the current shared financial costs of climate change are enormous and growing (estimated to be hundreds of billions dollars each year globally). This includes disaster relief and infrastructure costs for flooding, hurricanes, and wildfires as well as higher health care premiums to name just a few.

Don't expect every conversation you have to be earth-shattering (no pun intended...) Changing minds is a gradual process, and the goal is simply to make steady progress one person and one conversation at a time.

-Dustin Ogdin



GOOD NEIGHBOR AGREEMENT

Another Success for the GNA and our rivers

After more than two years of hard work, the East Boulder Mine and Stillwater Mine Adaptive Management Plans (AMP) are in the preliminary implementation phase. These plans are truly cutting-edge in the mining industry and continue the Good Neighbor Agreement's commitment to being "precautionary and proactive" in protecting the East Boulder and Stillwater Rivers.

The AMPs have a few key components that help to accomplish this:

- 1. Extending the Tier-Trigger Level Framework (TTLF) to groundwater.** Currently, this framework mandates specific responses by the mine when certain concentration levels of nitrogen or metals are reached in surface water. The current groundwater program only applies to a handful of wells and does not tie specific actions to specific concentration levels. The Good Neighbor Agreement Oversight Committees (made up of two Stillwater Protective Association or Cottonwood Resource Council members and two mine employees) must agree on the action to be taken before the mine is required to take any remedial actions. The new Adaptive Management Plan eliminates the need for Oversight Committee approval by creating a pre-approved framework of specific actions the mine is required to take to protect water quality.
- 2. Extending the surface water TTLF to Hertzler Ranch and the Benbow Portal at the Stillwater Mine.** Currently no surface water programs exist at either the Hertzler Ranch (where Stillwater Mine tailings are stored) or the Benbow Portal.
- 3. Three rings of monitoring wells.** The AMPs require operational, intermediate, and permit boundary groundwater monitoring wells. The operational wells are closest to mining activities, intermediate wells are farther downstream, and permit boundary wells are sited at the permit boundary. These three rings allow us to see water quality changes at the earliest possible time – to hopefully react before rivers are affected.
- 4. Monitoring of metals in groundwater.** The current GNA water program does not monitor metals in groundwater (though it does monitor metals in surface water). The new AMP will expand monitoring to include metals in both surface water *and* groundwater.



New protections are being phased in to the Good Neighbor Agreement which will further strengthen protections for the Stillwater River (pictured above) as well as the East Boulder River.

Our Good Neighbor Agreement Task Force is still working with Sibanye-Stillwater Mining Company to iron out the last details. We hope to incorporate the final AMPs into the Agreement by the end of 2019.

-Mikindra Morin 

CLEAN ENERGY

Public hearings coming in May for NorthWestern Energy rate case

While the legislative soap opera swallowed much of our time this winter, the NorthWestern Energy electric rate case was in full swing. Since intervenors submitted thousands of pages of written testimony, legal briefs, and evidence to the Montana Public Service Commission in the past few months, they are now gearing up for in-person hearings on this rate case. So are interest groups and everyday Montanans.

The in-person hearings on the rate case are much like any other court case – except there are a lot more energy experts involved, and the result is going to shake up your utility bill.

The Public Service Commission will use this two to three-week hearing process to deliberate and ask questions before they make a final decision on how to approve NorthWestern Energy's request to increase utility rates. Here are the issues we are following:

1. The proposed new rate class for distributed generation, aka net metering – As you read in a previous edition of the Plains Truth, NorthWestern Energy proposes to establish a whole new equation for how it charges net metered customers. Net metered customers are people who have solar panels or other energy generating systems on their property, but are still tied to the grid. Legal intervenors like Montana Renewable Energy Association and Vote Solar are challenging this proposed change. We want to make sure PSC commissioners know that net metered customers deserve a fair electric bill that doesn't rig the game against them or other solar users.
2. Re-evaluating what ratepayers owe on Colstrip Unit 4 – When NorthWestern Energy purchased its 30% share of Colstrip Unit 4 in 2007, they paid \$187 million for it. However, they asked ratepayers to reimburse them \$407 million for that share of Unit 4, and the Public Service Commission APPROVED IT. This is one of the most contentious deals NorthWestern Energy ever made, and the PSC needs to know that the public sees righting this wrong as a top priority.

Contact your Public Service Commissioner and ask them about the two issues listed above. Let them know that...

- We the people are opposed to NorthWestern Energy adding extra demand charges to the net metered customer rate class.
- NorthWestern Energy's proposal would stifle future solar generation in our state - we want a fair shake for solar, not a rigged game.
- Net meterers pay their fair share. The argument that NorthWestern Energy uses – saying that net meterers create a “cost shift” – distorts the issue and results in arbitrary fixed fees on solar customers.

Much like the citizen lobbying our members did at the legislature, we plan to conduct citizen lobbying with the five-member Public Service Commission to make a wise decision. You can contact them anytime at <http://psc.mt.gov/Contact-Us/Contact-Commissioners>. To learn more, please attend our Rate Case Information Session:

SAVE THE DATE

Rate Case Information Session

Sponsored by Northern Plains' Clean Energy Task Force

When: Tuesday, May 21

Where: Billings (specific location TBD)

Time: TBD

For more information, contact Makenna at (406) 248-1154 or email makenna@northernplains.org.

-Makenna Sellers



COUNCIL ROUNDUP

CMRC propels COOL, C-PACE, & solar

In January, Central Montana Resource Council hosted a public seminar on Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) in Lewistown. Northern Plains ranchers Gilles Stockton, Walter Archer, and Brad Sauer told a crowd of 70 about the need to restore COOL. The seminar was a great success—and continued to build support for COOL in central Montana.

CMRC member Jean Collins spoke at Northern Plains’ “Clean Power for All” rally in Helena. Jean told ralliers about her support for C-PACE and clean energy solutions from her perspective as priest-in-charge of St. James Episcopal in Lewistown. Thanks, Jean!

CMRC continues to make solar mainstream in central Montana. The Lewistown Art Center’s solar array went live this winter, and CMRC is supporting the Fergus County Fair Board in their effort to get solar.

-Caitlin Cromwell 



An attendee of CMRC’s COOL Seminar speaks up in support of COOL.

YVCC makes headlines on energy, conservation, & water quality



Eric Schmidt speaks to the Billings City Council.

With a membership of more than 400 households, Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council is making a difference in Billings.

YVCC’s Sustainability Committee is wrapping up its year-long effort to revive a Commission on Energy and Conservation. Co-Chair Eric Schmidt addressed the City Council and we expect final action in May.

Our Community Food Campaign is working to establish a “Harvest of the Month” program at two Billings schools. Members are also working closely with the Yellowstone Valley Food Hub on a spring petting zoo at Swanky Roots on May 11th and a Chef’s Dinner in the fall.

YVCC is participating in the Coulson Park Master Plan. Members will also be meeting with the City and County about Project Re:Code, a joint effort to rewrite local zoning plans for the first time in 50 years.

An op-ed by Gray Harris helped bring down HB 625, Rep. Bill Mercer’s (R-Billings) legislative proposal to scrap the state standard for nutrient pollution of streams, and other YVCC members also had op-eds and letters to the editor published.

-Kari Boiter 

COUNCIL ROUNDUP

CRC awaits solar decision; members keep eye on wind proposals

Cottonwood Resource Council members are waiting to hear a decision on their grant application to NorthWestern Energy to help fund a solar array on Sweet Grass County High School. The decision is expected in April, so fingers crossed!

A couple of wind projects are proposed in Sweet Grass County, so CRC members are attending public meetings to learn more about what these projects will look like for their community.



CRC members celebrating their work at the 2018 Annual Picnic

-Mikindra Morin 

BA Summer Celebration of Soda Butte Creek



Soda Butte Creek is the first river to be removed from the "Impaired Waters" list in Montana, thanks to Beartooth Alliance and several agencies.

Because of the hard work by Beartooth Alliance and the late DEQ hydrogeologist, Tom Henderson, Soda Butte Creek is the first stream to be removed from the Impaired Waters List in Montana.

You are invited to join Beartooth Alliance on July 18 at the Range Rider Lodge in Silver Gate to celebrate the recovery of Soda Butte Creek, as well as Tom Henderson's life and work to clean up abandoned mines.

-Maggie Gordon 

Sleeping Giant Presents on Sustainable City Lighting

SGCC members are spreading the word about sustainable city lighting opportunities. As Northwestern Energy transitions its light fixtures around Montana to energy-efficient LED bulbs from 2019 – 2022, Sleeping Giant is advocating for ways that the city of Helena could limit light pollution, save energy, and make smarter decisions with city lighting through a comprehensive city lighting plan and a more robust agreement with the utility. SGCC members presented their research to the Helena Citizens Conservation Advisory Board, the Transition Streets Project, and more.

SGCC plans to continue working with city government to make sure Helena becomes a leader in smart public lighting and reducing their carbon footprint. In addition to city lighting, SGCC is re-energizing the Local Food Committee for a Chef's Expo event in Helena this August. Contact makenna@northernplains.org for more details!



Old historic fixtures with sodium vapor lights illuminate the downtown walking mall.

-Makenna Sellers 

COUNCIL ROUNDUP

DRC heads to Helena

During February, four Dawson Resource Council members traveled the 419 miles to Helena to lobby for Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) and Commercial Property-Assessed Clean Energy (C-PACE). Our work flipped a few votes, but we also might've worn through our shoes... boy, lobbying is no joke.

DRC's recycling effort is scaling up. In March, we held another town hall to discuss more permanent recycling solutions with the community. The mayor even attended, and shared a few ideas! In the coming months, we'll work to secure a site and fundraise for equipment.

In February, DRC members tabled about COOL at the Glendive Agricultural Trade Expo (GATE).

-Caitlin Cromwell 



DRC members Bruce and Sue Peterson get a tour of the Capitol from Sen. Steve Hinebauch (R-Glendive), far left, and Rep. Ken Holmlund (R-Miles City), far right.

Bear Creek Council, Gardiner take a stand on the Crevice Mine



BCC and Gardiner residents gather outside the community center in April.

work here.” Ulrich remarked. “The recent bipartisan act of Congress demonstrates just how special this area is to our nation.”

Contact BCC's affiliate organizer Makenna at (406) 248-1154 or makenna@northernplains.org if you want to help Bear Creek Council win this campaign!

-Makenna Sellers 

COUNCIL ROUNDUP

YBCC brings the sunshine

Yellowstone Bend Citizens Council's "Solarize Livingston" campaign has met our first goal: more than 50 Livingston area residents have signed up to see if their property is right for solar! YBCC hopes that at least 30 of those residents move forward with a solar array – we've made the process streamlined and easy so they can do so.

We'll be celebrating installations shortly and will commence the Solarize Livingston campaign with a community bike ride through all the new installations later this summer. Stay tuned!

-Sydney Ausen



YBCC members Jack and Wendy Heckles are grateful for the affordable energy their solar array provides.

SPA discusses local food, GNA



The historic Cobblestone School in Absarokee.

Members of Stillwater Protective Association gathered in Absarokee for their April meeting where they received a presentation on Northern Plains' local food endeavors, including that of encouraging schools to participate in a "Harvest of the Month" program. Good Neighbor Agreement Task Force member Van Wood gave the group an update on current and ongoing concerns, including Stillwater Mine's desired "laydown area" (three-year temporary work space) at Cathedral Mountain. The next meeting will be held in Absarokee's Cobblestone School at 6 pm on May 15.

-Olivia Stockman Splinter



CCRC Elects New Officers

Carbon County Resource Council members gathered in Red Lodge in February to elect new officers and hear from a panel of local and statewide voices about the importance of community recycling and composting. CCRC's newly elected officers for 2019 are Sue Beug (Chair), Tom Tschida (Vice-Chair), Nicole Aerne (Secretary), Betsy Scanlin (Treasurer), Becky Grey (Board Rep), and Julie Holzer (Board Rep). Congratulations to CCRC's officers!

Following our annual meeting, CCRC members hope to launch a campaign encouraging local businesses to use alternatives to plastic and Styrofoam while highlighting those businesses that already work to reduce their waste.

-Sydney Ausen



Sue Beug was elected CCRC Chair for 2019.

Check the date at the upper right of your address label to see when your membership is due for renewal. Your membership pays for all the work you read here!



NORTHERN PLAINS' ONLINE AUCTION



Northern Plains' annual online auction returns this July, and promises to be bigger than ever! Auction items are just now being gathered and typically include (but are not limited to):

- Grass-fed Wagyu beef from Omega Beef
- Original art from Montana artists
- Travel getaways and experiences
- Jewelry, luxury items, and more!

Bidding will begin on Monday, July 1, and will conclude on Wednesday, July 31. Watch for our announcements on Facebook and in your email inbox.

This online auction is a great way to support Northern Plains' issue campaigns and bring home treasures from across Montana. If you'd like to donate an item like those listed above, please contact Caleb at (406) 248-1154 or caleb@northernplains.org.



"Nothing But Daisies"
limited edition print
by Bozeman artist
Sarah Angst